Commandant’s Quality Award

Board of Examiners’

Handbook

Coast Guard Quality Center
Training Center Petaluma
599 Tomales Road
Petaluma, CA 94952
707-765-7127

Dear Member of the Commandant's Quality Award Examining Board,

On behalf of Commandant (G-CQ) and the Coast Guard Leadership and Quality Institute, thank you for your willingness to serve as a member of the Commandant's Quality Award (CQA) Examining Board. As a CQA Program member, much is expected of you. The validity and prestige of the CQA rest upon the integrity, thoroughness, commitment, and energy of its Examiners. As volunteers, you are the nucleus of the Program, and we truly value your efforts.

This *Handbook* is a resource document provided to help you successfully complete your application review and scoring. Its purpose is to provide you with a summary of basic information about the process used in evaluating applications. It's intended to serve as a resource document to help ensure fair and thorough evaluation of applications.

Thank you again for your commitment to advancing performance excellence in the Coast Guard. We hope you derive great satisfaction from taking part in this exciting and challenging adventure. We are looking forward to working with you in our mutual quest to improve Coast Guard management and business performance.

Sincerely,

Buddy Custard, LCDR
Chief, Leadership and Quality Institute

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COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS

Users of this *Handbook* are encouraged to send suggestions for revisions to:

Coast Guard Leadership and Quality Institute
Training Center Petaluma
599 Tomales Road
Petaluma, California 94952-5000
(Fax) 707-765-7530

Board of Examiners

General Duties

As a member on an examining board, the duties you will perform will help build the foundation for the value and meaning of the Commandant's Quality Award Program. The importance of your contribution cannot be overstated. Accordingly much is expected of you. You must:

- Acquire an understanding of your role in the CQA process;
- Be able to fulfill your specific responsibilities as an Examiner; and
- Adhere to the rules defined in the Code of Ethics and Rules of Conduct.

Roles and Responsibilities

Quality Council: Provide leadership and direction to the CQA program.

G-CQ:
- Provide advice to the Quality Council regarding the CQA program.
- Provide leadership, direction and support to the Leadership and Quality Institute (LQI) on the CQA program.
- Solicit for applications and CQA Examiners.
- Coordinate the judging of the CQA application.
- Announce the award recipients.
- Review the process for improvements.

Leadership and Quality Institute (LQI):
- Provide advice to G-CQ regarding the CQA program.
- Administer the CQA process.
- Update the CQA Criteria.
- Develop and deliver the Examiner Training Curriculum.
- Develop Job-aids/Guidebooks for the CQA/Examination Process.
- Coordinate and administer the logistics of the Examination Process.
- Review all CQA processes for improvements.

Examiners:
- Individually read, comment upon, and score application.
- Participate in the consensus review of the application.
- Prepare a consensus feedback report to the applicant.

Examiner Selection Criteria

Members of the CQA Board of Examiners are selected based on individual merits. The Criteria used in the selection of Board members include: breadth and source of professional experience; diversity of field/staff experience; command leadership representation; previous examination experience; knowledge of performance improvement concepts; and business/mission area expertise. An earnest effort is made to involve officer, enlisted and civilian personnel, representing the various Coast Guard mission areas, from across the United States.

Code of Ethics

Board Members

In promoting high standards of public service and ethical conduct, Board members:

- Shall conduct themselves professionally, with truth, accuracy, fairness, and responsibility to the Coast Guard and the public.
- Shall not represent conflicting interest, nor place themselves in such a position where the board members' interests may be in conflict, or appear to be in conflict, with the purposes and administration of the Award.
- Shall safeguard the confidences of all parties involved in the examination of present or former applicants.
- Shall not serve as Examiner of any command, division office, or business unit application of which he/she is employed or which a consulting arrangement is in effect.
- Shall not offer confidential information or disclosures which may in any way influence the Award integrity or process, currently or in the future;
- Shall not intentionally communicate false or misleading information which may compromise the integrity of the Award process or decisions therein.

Furthermore, each board member shall endeavor to aid the professional development and advancement of the Commandant's Quality Award program as it serves to stimulate Coast Guard units to improve performance through improved quality management.

Rules of Conduct

Rules of Conduct The following Rules of Conduct are established to maintain the confidentiality of all award application information, including the identity of applicants, and to preserve fairness in the examination process.

- All applicant information shall be treated as confidential, and the following precautions shall be taken:
    - Applicant's information shall <u>not</u> be discussed with anyone, with the exception of designated team members and CQA representatives (the person(s) administering/overseeing the examination process for G-CQ).
    - No copies of application reports shall be made or retained by examiners.
- Each Examiner is responsible for <u>personally</u> and <u>independently</u> scoring all assigned applications.
- Examiners shall <u>not</u> communicate with the applicant unit for additional documentation, information, or clarification. If questions arise, a CQA representative should be contacted.
- Examiners shall <u>not</u> at any time (during or after the evaluation cycle) independently give feedback to applicants regarding scoring or overall performance.
- Examiners advising or participating with an organization in the preparation of an Award application shall not reveal or discuss that participation with other Examiners, either during the training or examination review phases.
- Appointees to the Board of Examiners may identify themselves as members of the Board.

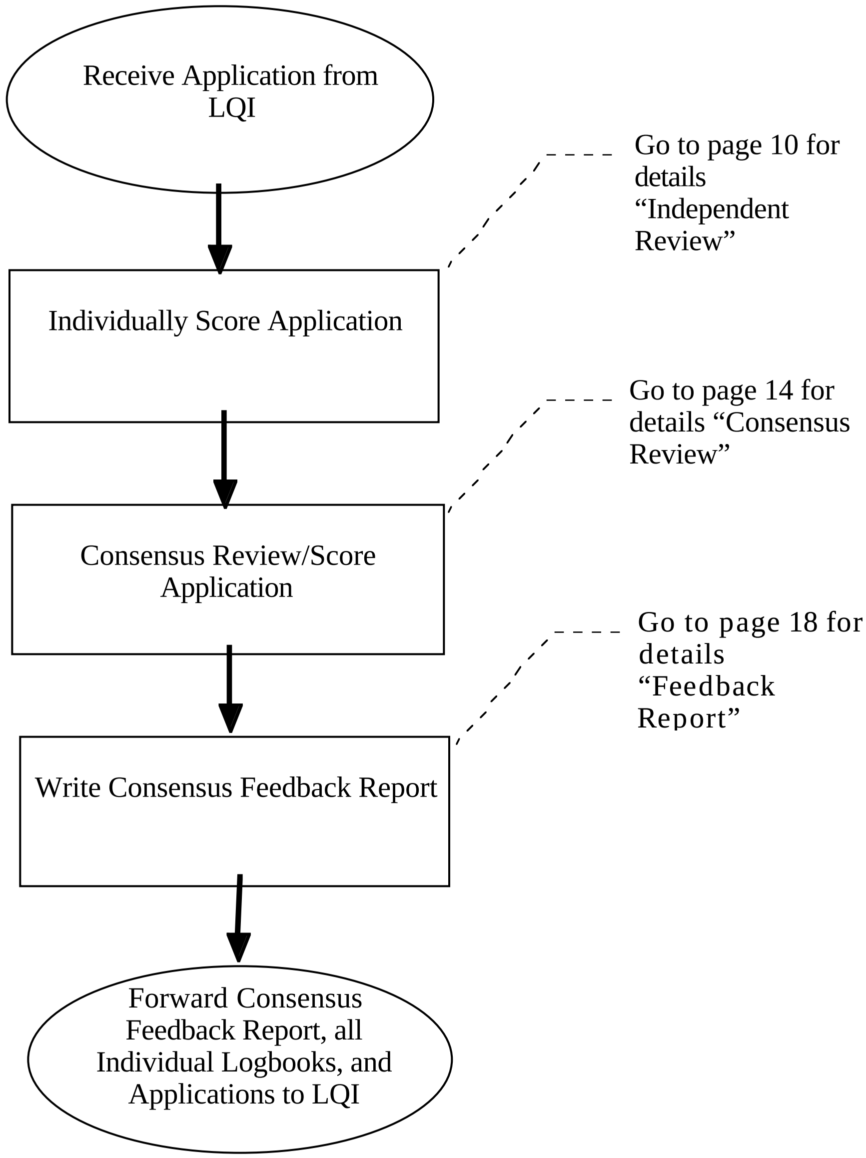
Examination Process

Assignment of Board Members

The Award Program seeks to provide the fairest, most competent evaluation of each application. Accordingly, Board members are assigned to applications on the basis of their knowledge and experience, consistent with the requirements to avoid conflicts of interest, to apportion the application load equitably, and to adhere to agreed-upon schedules.

Key Process Steps

Applications for the CQA are evaluated by members of an examination board. All applicants receive a written feedback report detailing their strengths and areas for improvement. There are three stages in the examination process: (1) Individual Review; (2) Consensus Review; and (3) preparing the Feedback Report. The following diagram illustrates the process for examining applications.



Scoring System

Item Classification

Award Criteria Items are classified according to the kinds of information and/or data applicants are expected to furnish. The two types of Items are:

- Approach and Deployment
- Results

<u>Approach</u> and <u>Deployment</u> are linked to emphasize that descriptions of Approach should always convey Deployment — consistent with the specific requirements of the Item. Although Approach and Deployment dimensions are linked, feedback to the applicant reflects strengths and/or areas for improvement in either or both dimensions.

<u>Results</u> Items depend on data demonstrating performance levels and trends. However, the evaluation factors, “breadth and importance of performance improvements,” is concerned with how widespread and how significant an applicant’s improvement results are. This is directly related to the Deployment dimension. That is, if improvement processes are widely deployed, there should be corresponding results. A score for a Results Item is thus a composite based upon overall performance, taking into account the breadth and importance of improvements.

Refer to the *CQA Criteria Guidebook* for details on the evaluation system.

“Relevance and Importance” as Scoring Factors

The three dimensions described above are critical to the assessment and feedback. However, evaluation and feedback must also consider the relevance and importance to the applicant’s business in Approach, Deployment, and Results. The areas of greatest relevance and importance should be addressed in the applicant’s Executive Summary.

Scoring System **(continued)**

Assignment of Scores to Examination Items

Scoring refers to the process of identifying strengths and areas for improvement, and assigning a percent score based on those comments. Observe the following guidelines in assignment of scores to applicant's responses:

- All relevant Areas to Address should be included in the Item response. Responses should reflect what is relevant and important about the Areas to Address to the applicant's business.
- In assigning a score to an Item, an Examiner decides which scoring range, aka scoring band, (e.g., 40% to 60%) best fits the overall Item response. Overall, "best fit" does not require total agreement with each of the statements for that scoring range. The actual score <u>within the range</u>, when recorded in increments of 10%, depends upon the Examiner's judgment of the closeness of the Item response in relation to the statements in the next higher and next lower <u>ranges</u>.
- The Approach and Deployment Item score of 50% represents an approach that meets the <u>basic</u> objectives of the Item and is deployed to the principal activities covered in the Item. Higher scores reflect maturity (cycles of improvement), integration and broader deployment.
- A Results Item score of 50% represents clear indication of improvement trends and/or good levels of performance in the principal results areas covered in the Item. Higher scores reflect better improvement rates and comparative performance as well as broader coverage.

Scoring Reference

Prior to scoring, examiners should be thoroughly familiar with the following information in the *CQA Criteria Guidebook.*

- The Commandant's Quality Award Criteria;
- The Evaluation System and Scoring Guidelines; and
- All instructions to applicants regarding guidelines and suggestions for responding to the Criteria, including "Preparing the Executive Summary" and responding to both Approach & Deployment Items, and Result Items.

Frequently Asked Questions about Scoring

Must "Results" be addressed in every Category and Items?

Every Item is designated according to the type of information requested — Approach/Deployment or Results. All Categories ask for information on the actual "impact" (i.e., visible change in the organization) in the Items addressed. For example, Leadership (Category 1) is scored partly based on the evidence that awareness of leadership commitment is, in fact, widespread. Information and Analysis (Category 4) is scored partly based on evidence that the information system is actually in place and used. Also, process cited in Category 6 would be expected to be followed up in Category 7 with results and data, relevant to these specific key processes. The processes and results should be in concert with the organizations Business Factors.

Should Examiners use their own specific specialty knowledge in scoring?

Yes. Success of the scoring process depends upon the full range of expertise and experience of Examiners in their specialties. In Stage 2, consensus review, especially, such pooling would be appropriate. However, any information not derived from the application that an Examiner may have relating to the applicant or its products or services should not be used in developing comments or scores.

What is the "50%" mark?

For Approach/Deployment Items, the 50% mark represents an approach that should meet the basic objectives addressed in the Item. The approach should be applied or deployed to the principal activities covered in the Item. The approach and deployment should convey that the activities described are the actual system the organization uses and not merely a plan or a pilot effort. Scores higher than 50% should reflect refinement, continued progress in deployment, and cycles of improvement.

For Results Items, the 50% mark represents clear indication of improvement trends and/or current good levels of performance in areas of the business covered in the Item. Very high scores require some objective basis for demonstrating that results are the leaders.

Must applicants address all "Areas to Address?"

Yes. All Areas must be mentioned, or at least explicit reasons given for omitting one or more. Failure to address and Area (or to comment on why it is not addressed) should be a basis for an Area for Improvement in the feedback comments and a significant consideration in assigning a score. Individual Areas are not assigned specific point values. Scoring should take into account how important an Area is for the success of the applicant's business.

Should the Examiner "believe" data and information presented by applicants?

Yes. Assume all data and information presented are factual for purposes of scoring.

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Frequently Asked Questions about Scoring (continued)

Must the commentary and scoring for an Item be based only upon information the applicant has presented for that Item?	No, but the applicant's primary information for an Item should be contained in that Item response. Applicants are permitted to cross-reference to avoid significant duplication of information. Such cross-references need to be given full consideration by the Examiners. Occasionally, applicants include information that bears directly upon one Item in their response to another Item, without cross-reference. Such information should be credited. In general, Examiners are expected to be alert to relevant information no matter where it appears in the applications.
Are all "Areas to Address" equally weighted in reaching a score for an Item?	No. Scoring should take into consideration how important an "Area to Address" is for the success of an organization in the applicant's business environment.
To which standards should "Results" be scored: agency-specific standards or worldwide standards in similar processes?	In general, the Award intends that relevant worldwide benchmarks be used, particularly in assigning the very highest scores. However, if the organization operates under constraints that make agency-specific standards comparison more sensible, Examiners may take such constraints into account. The idea is to set high but reasonable standards in seeking comparison points. Bear in mind, too, that one of our main aims is to point out opportunities for improvement.

Most Common Difficulties in Scoring

Scores not adequately related to the key business factors for each Scoring Guideline	Examiners are asked to consider the key business factors for each Item to determine whether the applicant's response is relevant and important to the applicant's organization, in particular the customers requirements and key business drivers. Items scores should be based on the best fit of the Item response with the scoring Guidelines
Examiner acceptance of statements made by applicants	Examiners are asked to accept applicant's statements at face value and to base judgments on whether or not statements are "reasonably supported." The greatest difficulties arise in Approach/Deployment Items. "Reasonably supported" should be taken to mean that the applicant provides sufficient information to convey what is done and who does it to give the Examiners a flavor of the applicant's system for accomplishing the aims addressed in an Item. Without such information, an Examiner would have difficulty giving useful feedback. Statements such as "the CO of our unit is fully committed to quality" are not reasonably supported (even though they may be factual) as they do not permit reasonably assessment and feedback. However, "reasonably supported" should not be taken to mean proof backed by considerable detail. **Remember, applicants are given only 28 pages in which to address a wide range of issues throughout the entire organization.**
Setting the 50% Point	Some Examiners take 50% point to mean excellence and maturity, covering all activities under the scope of an Item. This approach tends to compress the measurement scale, virtually eliminating scores of 60% or higher. This in turn, tends to differentiate poorly among applicants, despite real differences. Though the 50% point reflects systems and results of organizations with functioning quality systems, it should not be taken to mean full deployment, maturity, and refinement.
Using the Award Criteria as a "checklist"	Some Examiners appear to expect applicants to address fully every individual point in the Criteria, even though many such points are included to illustrate the meaning of the Criteria. This approach generally results in scores that are too low and feedback that lacks relevance. Again, it is important to remember that the page limits prevent applicants from furnishing all details included or implied within an Item. The most effective scoring and the most useful feedback derive from analysis of how well the applicants address the basic objectives of the Item.
Treatment of missing information	Examiners are asked to note significant missing information with a (-). This designation is intended to reinforce the concept that significant missing information must be treated as having a negative impact on scoring and resulting in an Area for Improvement in the Feedback report. The degree to which missing information negatively affects an Item score should take into account how important the Area to Address is for the success of the organization, considering the applicant's business.

Independent Review

Independent Review in a Nutshell

The independent review is the first stage of evaluating applicants for the Commandant's Quality Award. During the independent review, each applicant is reviewed by a team of three Examiners, each working independently. Each examiner reads the application, writes comments about Strengths and Areas for Improvement, and scores the applicant's response to each Item against the Criteria. The results from the independent reviews are consolidated and provide the basis for decisions during the consensus review by the Examiner Team.

Independent Review Process

Suggest that Examiners use the following steps in carrying out scoring during the Independent Review:

- Read the ENTIRE application before beginning scoring.
- Identify and list the key business factors on the General Business Factors worksheet located in the *CQA Criteria Assessment Logbook.* The applicant's responses and your scoring should be consistent with the key business factors the **applicant** identified in the Executive Summary and the Criteria Item responses.
- Focus on the applicant's General Business Factors in your reading and keep it in mind as you are scoring. Some areas of the Business Factors will be particularly relevant and important to the proper evaluation of the application. **(The Examiner Team may want to reach consensus on the applicant's General Business Factors before proceeding.)**
- Note which evaluation dimensions, Approach/Deployment or Results, apply to each Item in the Award Criteria Guidebook.
- Read the Criteria and application response for the respective Item being scored.
- Read and re-read the Criteria as comments are constructed, making sure the comments relate to the Criteria. Assess what is written and <u>reasonably supported</u> in the application. Do not make assumptions positive or negative, that cannot be supported by information presented in the application itself. List vague or unclear issues as potential feedback issues.
- Check to see that all relevant "Areas to Address" are included in the applicant's response. Note any important information that is missing, but required, in responding to "Areas to Address."

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Independent Review **(continued)**

Independent Review Process (continued)

- Write comments in complete sentences on the significant Strengths and Areas for Improvement in the *CQA Criteria Assessment Logbook.* Designate Strengths with the prefix (+) and Areas for Improvement with a (-). Designate particularly important Strengths or Areas for Improvement with a double symbol (++ or --).

- Review the Scoring Guidelines found in the *CQA Criteria Guidebook* for the best fit score, first by testing the applicant's response as evaluated through the written comments against the Scoring <u>ranges</u> (10-30% box, 40-60% box, etc.) and determine best fit. Next refine the score to the top, middle, or bottom portion of the ban and assign the final score in 10 percent increments (e.g., 10, 20 , 30 , not 5, 25, 45). For example, if the response best fits the 10-30% ban, the refinement would result in selecting a 10%, 20%, or 30% score.

- Complete the Score Summary Worksheet in the *CQA Criteria Assessment Logbook*.

- After constructing comments for all of the Items, write a one or two page overall summary that captures the repeating or common themes (both Strengths and Areas for Improvement).

- Prepare for the Consensus Review Process.

Frequently Asked Questions About Independent Review

What happens if an Examiner has a conflict of interest with the assigned application?

Every effort is made to identify conflicts of interest before assignments are made. Examiners should open each assigned application immediately to scan the application for any conflicts of interest. If a potential conflict is discovered, call on the CQA representative to verify that a conflict exists. After discussion, if it is agreed a conflict exists, the application will be assigned to another examination team.

How long does it take to complete the Independent Review?

Examiners report that on an average it takes approximately 7 to 9 hours to read an application, write comments for the Strengths and Areas for Improvement, determine an appropriate score for each Item, and complete the worksheets in the *Logbook*.

Is it better to write comments for an Item first or to select a score for the Item first?

Comments form the basis for the score. Delineation of the Strengths and Areas for Improvement related to the Criteria requirements and key business factors provides the information to determine in which part of a particular scoring band the applicant's response to an Item falls. Writing comments before scoring helps to ensure that each Item's score is based on its specific merits, rather than an overall perception of the applicant carried over from the other Items.

What should an Examiner do if unable to complete the application?

Occasionally, unexpected circumstances interfere with the completion of examining an application. As soon as it's apparent you are unable to review the application due to some unexpected circumstance, notify the CQA representative so that appropriate alternatives can be developed to ensure a timely review for the applicant.

How many applications will each Examiner review?

The number of reviews per Examiners is related to the number of Examiners on the Board and the number of applications received. Over the last several years, the range of applications reviewed by each Examiner has been three to four.

Do’s and Don’ts for the Independent Review

Do

- Maintain confidentiality regarding all information about the application.
- Open the Application immediately to scan for conflict of interest.
- Allow adequate time to provide a thorough review of all seven Categories, and to complete the *logbook*.
- Review the Comment Examples on pages 25 - 27 of this handbook to improve the quality of your written comments.
  - Ensure comments addressed the basic objectives of the Criteria for the Item and that they are actionable.
- Notify the CQA representative as soon as possible if you are unable to complete a review on time, or believe you may have a conflict of interest.
- Refer to the *Scoring Guidelines* to determine an appropriate score for each Item.
- Use a word processor or legible handwriting so your fellow Examiners will be able to use your comments for the feedback report or consensus review.

Don’t

- Discuss the application or scoring with the applicant or anyone outside the designate examination team (with the exception of CQA representatives).
- Make prescriptive or predictive comments in the *logbook*.
- Make copies of the application or the complete *logbook.*
- Delegate word processing of the *logbook* to another person outside the team.

Consensus Review

Consensus Review in a Nutshell

The purpose of the consensus review is to improve scoring and feedback. The consensus process clarifies and resolves differences in the scores resulting from the independent review. The consensus review is a particularly important step in the review process because consensus comments are used to improve the feedback report to applicants. The objectives during this review is to pool information so that all Examiner knowledge is additive by:

- exposing all team members to the common pool;
- achieving basic agreement on Strengths and Areas for Improvement; and
- weighing overall findings to assign a score.

Consensus Review Process

Consensus is a rationally derived decision on a feedback comment or a numerical score, based upon the contributions of **ALL** team members. The Examiner team discusses the logbooks resulting from the independent review, and arrives at a consensus decision. The suggested steps in the consensus review process are:

- Coordinate with team members on consensus meeting times.
- Develop a set of ground rules on how your team is going to reach consensus.
- Develop assignments for all team members:
  - Category discussion leaders
  - Feedback Report writer
  - Timekeeper
- Adjourn. Consolidate comments and scores from the worksheets drafted during the Independent Review for assigned Categories.
  - Review the written comments of all team members and consider all points of view presented. All independent review *Logbooks* are considered in determining the applicant's score and feedback.
  - Summarize the areas of agreements from the Independent Review, both Strengths and Areas for Improvements.
  - Prepared draft comments.
- Prepare to participate in the full discussion. Your preparation and discussion should focus on those comments that address the points important to the Criteria and the applicant.

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Consensus Review (continued)

Consensus Review Process (continued)

- Reconvene. Suggest the Category discussion leader use the following steps in leading discussion for their respective Category:
  - Summarize findings from logbooks
  - Discuss critical areas of difference. Ask for comments from each team member.
  - Identify, consolidated, and record pertinent comments, +,++,-,--'s.
  - Propose a scoring range and a consensus score for the agreed upon comments.
  - Poll team members for agreement with the proposed range, then the score. Discuss differences. Determine a consensus score.
  - Confirm the agreed upon Item consensus score and comments at the end of the Category discussion.

- Use the Scoring Guidelines to assign a new score based on the consolidated comments (range first then score). Items that require consensus : all Items with over 40 points range in the score among the examination team must be consented. Items with less than a 30 point range are to be consented at the team members discretion (high point value Items and Items with a wide range of Strength and Areas for Improvement are candidates for consensus).

- Prepare the final consensus feedback report and Score Summary Worksheet.

- Identify the most important Strengths and Areas for Improvement overall to be included on the Comment Summary Worksheet.

- Forward the following to the CQA representative:

  - final consensus feedback report, which includes a 1 to 2 page summary overview of your evaluation;

  - all application copies; and

  - all copies of the individual *Logbooks*.

Frequently Asked Questions About Consensus Review

How long does it take to complete the consensus review?	Examiners report that on an average it takes approximately 7 to 9 hours to reach consensus on an application, consolidate comments for the Strengths and Areas for Improvement, and determine an appropriate score for each Item.
What if I can't be there for part of the consensus review?	It's critical that **all** team members participate in the consensus review process! If your schedule changes and you must step away from the examination process, alert your team members and the CQA representative as soon as possible. They'll have to reschedule the review process to allow for your full participation. It's essential that each team member participate in the **entire** examination process.
Do all Items need to be consented?	Yes and No. Items with a percent score difference of 40% or greater among team members <u>must</u> be discussed and consented. Items with a percent score difference of 30% or less among team members may or may not be consented at the discretion of the team, depending on the degree of unanimity in written comments. If the team decides not to consensus on scores of an Items with a difference of 30% or less in scores, average the individual scores of the team members and round up or down accordingly. • 1-4: round down • 5-9: round up

Do's and Don'ts for a Successful Consensus Review

Do

- Prepare. Prepare. Prepare.
  It's essential that each team member fully prepare prior to the consensus review process.
- Have the necessary materials at hand: *Award Criteria Guidebook*, the application, this *Handbook*, the Scoring Guidelines, and your *logbook*.
- Participate fully.
- Listen to all points of view presented. Seek first to understand.
- Seek out the opinions of others, including the quieter members.
- Provide your point of view, then be flexible.
- Focus on discussing the alignment of the proposed consensus score with the proposed comments, the Criteria, and the Scoring Guidelines.

Don't

- Focus solely on numerical scores.
- Isolate or polarize team members who have differing views
- Become defensive about your scores and comments from the independent review.
- Ask other team members to justify high/low scores they assigned from the independent review. Remember, seek first to understand the thoughts and opinions of other!

Feedback System

Feedback Report

Each applicant for the Commandant's Quality Award receives a written feedback report. **The feedback report is the single most important component of the CQA process — it provides a pathway for continuous performance improvement.** Feedback is the mechanism by which applicants receive assessment from the Examiners on Strengths and Areas for Improvement relative to the requirements of the Award Criteria. Thus, each Examiner is the key to effective feedback. The comments you provide in your logbooks are vital to the production of the feedback to our ultimate customer — the applicant.

Effective feedback requires:

- a thorough evaluation of the application relative to the Award Criteria;
- targeting of **core** Strengths and Areas for Improvement for each Item; and
- the effective communication of those Strengths and Areas for Improvement to the applicant via the feedback report.

Feedback Report Format

The format used for the Feedback Report is as follows:

- **Cover Sheet**
- **Executive Summary —** one to two pages in length
- **Item Summary Worksheet —** details of the Strengths and Areas for Improvement for each Item
- **Score Summary Worksheet —** table containing the percentage distribution of applicant's numerical scores for each Item

Suggested Steps in Preparing the Feedback Report

Steps in preparing a Feedback Report

The suggested steps in preparing the Feedback Report are as follows:

- Review a sample case study feedback Report and the Feedback Report template provided by LQI to familiarize yourself with the report format and the number and types of comments.
- Review the application with special focus on the Business Factors Worksheet to refresh your recollection concerning what the applicant says is most important to the success of it organization, its key products/services, suppliers/partners, and customers.
- As you move from Item to Item, review the Criteria to be sure that the comments you write reflect the major points of the Criteria, the core values and concepts, the thoughts of the other Examiners, and the composite scoring profile.
- Group Examiners' similar logbook comments and synthesize the important concepts. Each feedback comment should consist of one to three clear declarative sentences capturing the essence of the applicant's Strength or Areas for Improvement relative to the key issues of the Criteria Item being addressed.
- Review all comments, looking for inconsistencies between Strengths and Areas for Improvement within and among Items. Also look for inconsistencies between the number/importance of the comments with the Item score. Lower scoring Items generally have fewer Strengths, more Areas for Improvement, and greater depth in the Areas for Improvement.

Making the Most of Your Written Comments

Writing Comments

The comments of Board members must be synthesized, condensed, and focused upon key issues. The following guidelines are intended to aid the Examiners in identifying and composing Strengths and Areas for Improvement and in writing feedback reports.

- Use bullet format for each comment.
- Use clear, simple, grammatically correct, and complete sentences.
- Comment on what is relevant and central to the Criteria Item being addressed, important to the applicant, and consistent with Scoring Guidelines.
- Use a polite, professional, and positive tone.
- Reflect the numerical score.
    - Basic information for low scoring applications.
    - Information on finer points for higher scoring applications.
    - The balance of Strengths and Areas for Improvement should reflect the score.
- Be specific and clear, referring to specific examples from the application. Remember, the applicant will want to begin improvements based upon the observations contained in the feedback report. Think of yourself as sitting across from the Commanding Officer of the applicant you are reviewing. What comments can you provide which will aid the CO in improving their unit’s performance.
- Use the applicant’s terminology when appropriate, but do not “parrot” the application. Avoid jargon or acronyms, unless used by the applicant.
- Be non-prescriptive; state observations and evaluations, not recommendations; refrain from the use of “could,” “would,” and “should.”
- Comment only on areas contained in the Criteria. The examiner must be careful not to allow his/her own background or opinions to affect statements in the feedback report.
- Avoid critiquing the applicant’s writing style or organization of the report; instead critique the approach, deployment, or results of their performance.
- Do not feel compelled to provide feedback on every “Area” within an “Item.”

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Making the Most of Your Written Comments (continued)

Writing Comments (continued)

- Address the most important Items from the findings of other Examiners who assessed the application. It is not necessary for the report to include relative minor findings. If you have any doubts, the point should be omitted— remember it is not necessary for the report to include each and every comment.
- Clearly identify the Strengths or the Areas for Improvement. Be sure each statement is clearly justified. Areas for Improvement should be traceable to omissions and problems noted in the review of the application. Give examples of what additional information is needed if something "is not clear."
- Draw linkages between Items or between an Item and the Business Overview.
- Check for inconsistencies and conflicting comments between Strengths and Areas for Improvements from Item to Item.
- Indicate the figure number from the application when referring to information glean from it, particularly for "result" Items.

Examples

Examples	+	a(3)	Surveys are conducted which ask specific questions about senior executive leadership and performance of senior leaders against stated values; feedback regarding the results of this survey are provided to senior leaders, who in turn develop personal leadership improvement plans to close the "gaps" identified by the survey.
	--	a(2)	Organizational values and capabilities are not considered in the strategic planning process.
	++	a	The organization's BP process provides the method for cascading the measures, goals and strategies throughout the organization and identifies the responsibilities of each major layer of management *(relative to each goal and strategy.)*
	-	b	The organization does not address how the principal financial and non-financial measures are used and how these measures relate to key stakeholders' primary needs and expectations.
	+	a	The unit forms teams with industry and the community to provide a forum for input and discussion of policy and regulation.
	-	a	How the unit looks ahead to anticipate trends and future needs of the community is (unknown) not addressed.
	--	a	How each type of data is related to key mission areas is not addressed. (The unit does *relate their measures to the Commandant's mission, but the selection of measures is not balanced and does not address all key result areas.)*
	+	a	Data is shared with customers and suppliers on a periodic basis in order to communicate priorities and verify the value and validity of the data collected.
	--	a	Data, such as customer satisfaction, product/service quality, operational results and employee satisfaction are not integrated into organization-level measures so that they can be reviewed, analyzed and used to establish priorities and action plans.

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The Feedback System **(continued)**

Examples (continued)	-	a	Although there is a strategic planning process, it is unclear specifically how regulatory and environmental risks are incorporated into the strategies.
	++	a	HRD goals are directly linked to the goals in the strategic plan (e.g.,, goals G1, G2, and G5 focus on flexibility and mobility; goals G4, G6, and G7 focus on empowerment, education and training; and goals G3, G4, G8, and G9 focus on rewards and recognition).
	+	b	An extensive, well rounded qualification based training program is deployed at monthly all hands and weekly informal meetings which uses a wide variety of training vehicles (e.g., visiting the waterfront areas where inspections are conducted, internship programs, a lateral qualification program, computer based training, formal and informal classroom training, etc.).
	-	c	How the information from employee surveys is used to improve employee satisfaction, is not addressed.
	--	b	How the organization maintains the performance of key support process is not addressed. Key processes and their principal requirements are not addressed.
	--	a	The requirements for key suppliers identified in the Executive Summary are not addressed in this Item.
	--	a	No supplier performance results were provided.
	+	a	All functional managers were trained in the “C4” process, which is used to capture the VOC and translate customer requirements into the product/service features that are robust against customer satisfaction.
	--	a/b	No data provided; anecdotal, qualitative data only. Levels and trends in key measures are not provided. All information provided is of a single point nature, not over a period of time.

continued on next page

The Feedback System **(continued)**

Examples (continued)	+	a	The command has identified at least two internal support processes: Food Service and PMS. Both of these processes have measurement systems that allows for the maintenance of the process performance. The PMS process in particular is developed in that it allows the Command to anticipate short comings in maintenance that may impact mission effectiveness.
	-	a	The Flight Condition Manning data presented in Enclosure 6 is inclusive. It is not clear that manning time has improved to a consistent standard, or the variances in the manning times are the direct result of process controls.
	--	a	Key business process management criteria nor their principal requirements were not addressed... seven of your eight “key processes” were not addressed.
	--	a	How the organization provides access to customers seeking information or wanting to provide feedback (in the case of response, compliance, and support) is not addressed.
	-	b	While two examples were provided, no systematic approach was described as to the continuous evaluation and improvement of info/data selection, analysis, and management in order to better align organization with business priorities.

Frequently Asked Questions About Writing Feedback Reports

How long does it take to write a feedback report?

Feedback writers tell us it takes approximately 4 hours to complete the final consensus feedback report.

How many comments should there be for each Item of the feedback report?

Although there is no hard and fast rule for the correct number of comments, there are generally 5 to 8 comments for each Item that cover the main purposes of the Item. Each comment usually consists of one to three declarative sentences that capture a key point of the Criteria Item. The comments are distributed between Strengths and Areas for Improvement so that they reflect the Item score. For Items scoring around 50 percent of the possible points, comments tend to be fairly divided between Strengths and Areas for Improvement; lower scoring Items would have more comments under Areas for Improvement than Strengths, while higher scoring would be reflected in greater numbers of comments under Strengths than for Area for Improvement.